

Rebuilder Reaches Out to Hispanic Community

By Traci Matt
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Juan Reyes' late mother used to tell her children: "In order for you to get out of my command, you have to bring me a paper that certifies you as a professional." Well, with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, Delphi national trainer certification, ASE technician certification, and ownership of three companies, she should be satisfied.

You may have noticed Reyes' bilingual column which was introduced in the *Exchange* this summer. His career may be in auto electrics, but his passion is increasing professionalism in the Hispanic community.

Reyes, a U.S. citizen, was born in the Dominican Republic and immigrated in 1977. His first job was at a gas station. One year before graduating from Farleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, N.J. in 1986, he and a partner built a small rebuilding shop behind his parents' house.

"I never bothered looking for work after graduation," said Reyes. "The business gave me the opportunity to start

something from scratch. The business went well and pretty soon we were known all over town not only for the units we sold but also for the electrical diagnostics we were doing. I felt so proud of the product we were building, every time a customer called complaining about our units being defective I would bet them that I was willing to close the shop if the unit was defective. This attitude was what opened the doors to car repairs and diagnostics."

In 1991, Reyes left the partnership and opened Liberty Auto Electric. (He said "Liberty" in this context should be interpreted as freedom.) Liberty Auto Electric did rebuilding as well as repairs. He said starting a business with a baby on the way was "no easy task" and created many sleepless nights. His biggest struggle was establishing credit as a new business.

"To get my first alternator I had to send one of my workers from Paterson, N.J. to a town in Florida with cash," he said. "Thanks to the Force of the Universe that we have available, I was able to pull it through."

As the rebuilding business began morphing, Liberty Auto Electric started doing more diagnostics and became known as the "Home of the Computerized Diagnostics." Eventually they separated the rebuilding end of the business from the service end and formed Liberty Rebuilders, Inc. Today both companies operate under the same roof with two rebuilders, three technicians, a service advisor and a delivery person.

Although the rebuilding end only supplies 20 percent of their business, they are still "holding on" because of loyal customers.

Reyes' wife, Yohanny, and their three school-aged children all help with the businesses. He said assisting with inventory, answering phones and performing other tasks helps develop their children's sense of responsibility.

"My treasure is my family," he said.

The Reyes family recently took on a new venture when they opened the Liberty Training Institute to help increase professionalism within their Hispanic community.

"There is a big need for technicians in the automotive field and this is a big labor opportunity for many people who want to get into the business," he said. "I want to increase the status of our techs through education. I feel that a technician is a professional who cares for his customers and today goes through many challenges."

Liberty Training Institute currently



offers a curriculum that introduces technologies in both English and Spanish.

“We start with a basic electrical course followed by training in charging systems, engine compression, air/fuel mixture theory, ignition testing, and advanced testing equipment. Here we have already laid out a good background and can go into OBD evolution and advanced OBD II strategies,” he said. “The final course is an introduction to new technologies.”

He is awaiting approval from the state on a new emission control repair curriculum.

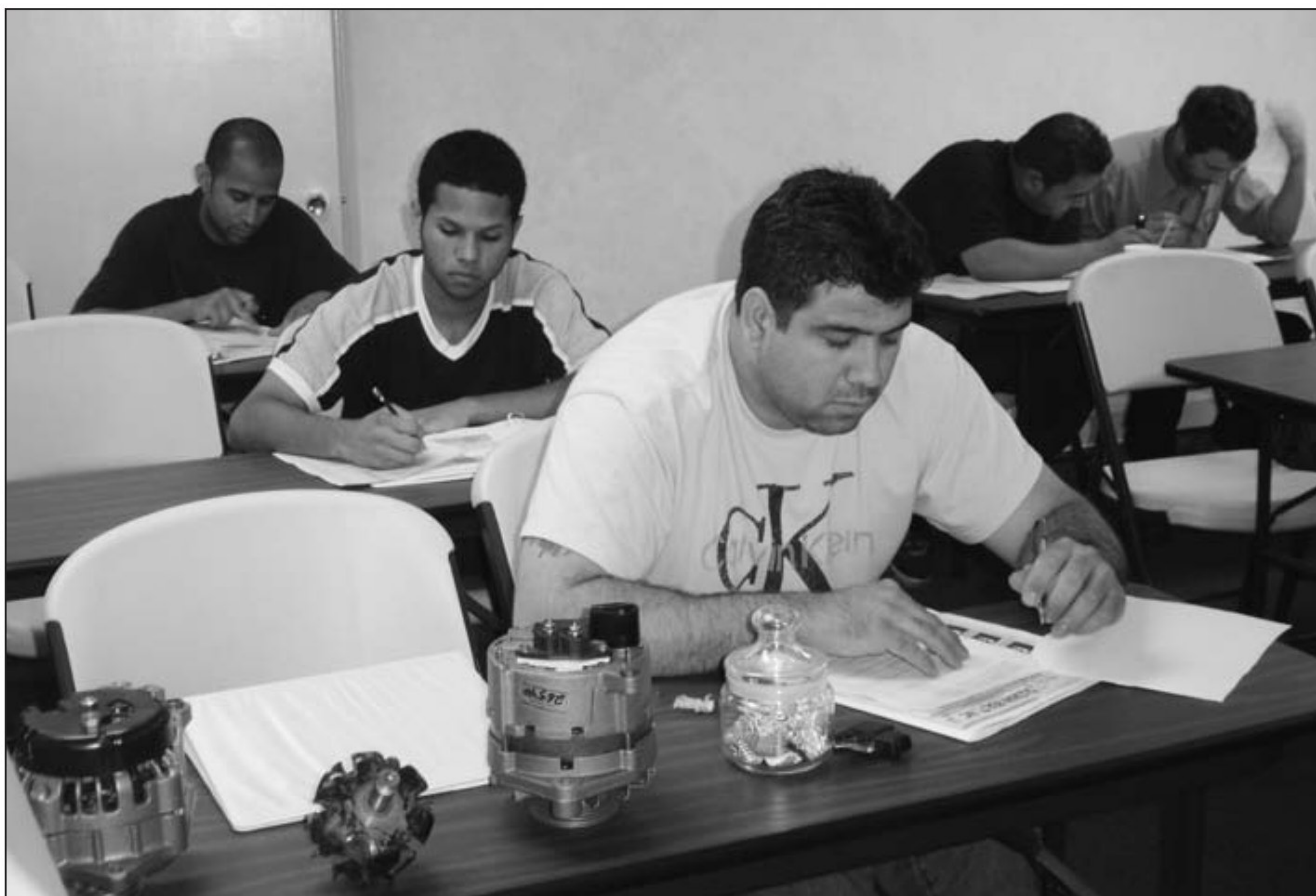
The classes meet in the spring and fall, and Reyes said his goal is to graduate 100 technicians through the entire curriculum.



Juan Reyes, owner of Liberty Auto Electric, is shown here teaching an automotive class at the training institute he founded.

“Rebuilding, as we all know, has taken a far turn. For the small rebuilders still standing we have to become better at what we do,” he said. This includes offering excellent service, keeping up with new technology, taking on the “great income opportunity” of electrical jobs, and being willing to troubleshoot.

“I know the world has become smaller with companies trying to get their products into the U.S.,” he said. “But there is always a way if one is committed.”



Students at the Liberty Training Institute study curriculum approved by the state of New Jersey. Eight courses are currently available.